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ABSTRACT

This handbook was developed by Storylinks, a provincial network in Ontario, Canada, to encourage and help groups to use popular oral history as a learning tool. The guide provides suggestions for those involved as learners or teachers in oral history to practice their interviewing and storytelling skills. The guide is organized in nine sections that cover the following: (1) using history in new ways; (2) how oral history is different from written history; (3) what popular oral history is; (4) the steps to follow to do a popular oral history project; (5) practice exercises in preparation for doing oral history work; (6) the tools and equipment needed to do popular oral history; (7) release forms and documentation; (8) using stories for learning; and (9) further reading--four citations about oral history and four citations on popular education. (KC)

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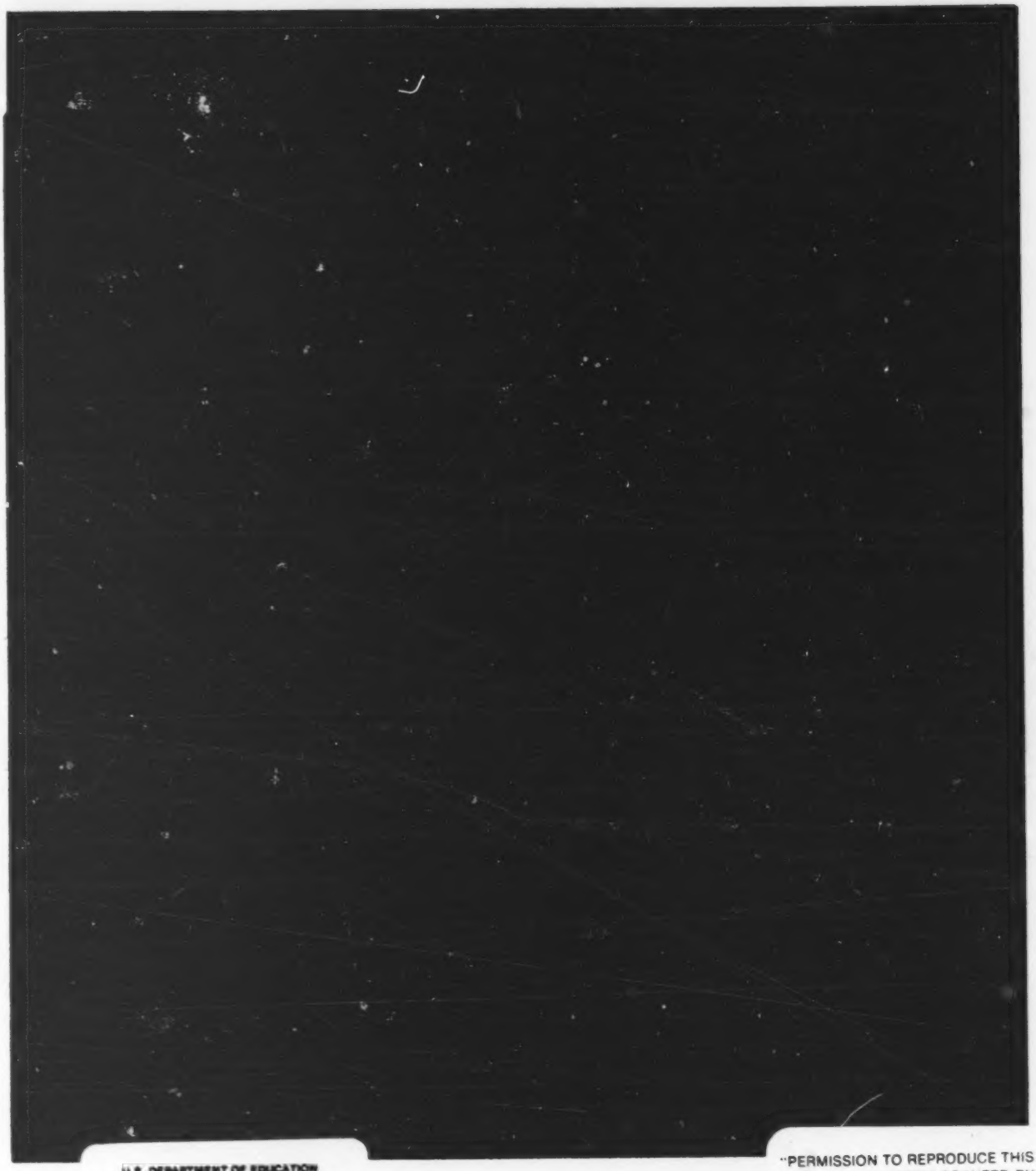

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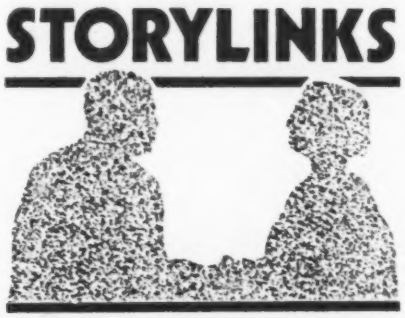

To order this book, and for more information, contact:

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295 Evelyn Ave.
Toronto, Ont.
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This book is also available on cassette.

A Message from the Storylinks Editorial Committee

Storylinks is a provincial network which provides training and resources to adult literacy programs. We encourage and help groups to use popular oral history as a learning tool. Doing oral history interviews is a wonderful way to build new skills and confidence. Learning about a subject by designing an oral history project and carrying it out is an empowering, exciting way to make discoveries.

We have prepared this guide so that learners and others involved in literacy can try their hand at interviewing and storytelling. We hope you will be inspired to share some of the stories you remember or were told. Or maybe you'll go looking for answers to some of life's mysteries among members of your family or neighbourhood. Whatever steps you take to use dialogue as the basis for learning, it will be a worthwhile experience.

Storylinks would like to thank the Ontario Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch for funding the production of this guide, and Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, National Literacy Secretariat, for project funding.

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Desktop publishing by Cathy Martin of Literacy Link Eastern Ontario

Storylinks also thanks David Schatzky for volunteering his time to record the audio version of this guide.

Table of Contents

1. A New Way of Looking at History ..... **page 1**

This section talks about how history is sometimes presented, and how we can use it in new ways.

2. Oral History - An Introduction ..... **page 4**

This section is about how spoken history is different from written history. It talks about why telling and hearing stories about the past is a good way to learn.

3. Popular Oral History and Literacy ..... **page 6**

This section explains what popular oral history is. Popular oral history is the name we use for the kind of oral history we do in literacy.

4. How to Do a Popular Oral History Project ..... **page 7**

This is the section of the book that gives you the steps to follow to do popular oral history. You might want to turn straight to this section, and read the rest later.

5. Practice ..... **page 12**

This section has exercises to get you ready for popular oral history work.

6. Choosing Equipment ..... **page 17**

This section tells you which tools you need to do popular oral history.

7. Release Forms and Documentation ..... **page 20**

This section tells you what you need to know about using taped interviews after they are done.

8. Using Stories for Learning ..... **page 24**

This section tells you how to do tape summaries, transcripts, and written stories from interviews. It also gives ideas for telling stories in other ways.

9. Further Reading ..... **page 32**

In this section, there is a list of other books to read if you want to find out more about oral history or popular education.

Who this Guide is For

This guide is for anyone involved in literacy. It is for learners to use, with or without the help of tutors or program staff. Section 4, the "how-to" part, is written plainly and is also covered in the cassette version, so that learners can do interviews on their own. The guide is also for literacy workers who would like to try new methods.

What this Guide is For

This guide is about using history in a new way. It shows how one form of history, oral history, can be a powerful tool in literacy work. Using oral history is an enjoyable way to learn about the people, places and things around us. We can base oral history work on our own interests and concerns. This guide explains how the people we know can be sources for oral history. They can share stories and information which teach us about history. We can combine this with our literacy learning.

This guide explores some questions about history. Who is it for? Why is it done? How is it done? History belongs to everyone. We can all do it, from our own experiences. All of us have something to teach, and something to learn. Mixing history with literacy work is creative. Our curiosity is the starting point. There are at least three positive results: our experience of doing history, a lasting record of a part of the past, and a chance to do literacy from a new direction.

Note:

In this guide, we use "they" or "them" when we mean the singular for either gender. We do this because it seems clearer than "he or she" or "s/he". Would somebody out there please invent a new neutral pronoun, please?

1. A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT HISTORY

Doing History

For most of us, history is "something in the past" and is done by scholars or experts. But there is a lot of history that "historians" don't cover. History is more interesting when see ourselves as part of it. By doing history, we can include our own stories.

History can teach us more than facts about famous people or dates. History isn't just in text books. History can be about anything that has already happened. We can become historians ourselves, by looking at the past.

History can help us understand yourselves and our place in the world. Doing history can help us find answers to the questions that concern us. It can help us see things from a new point of view.

The Subject of History

History, as a subject, is usually about prime ministers, politicians, kings, queens, soldiers and businessmen. These "important" people have always crowded the stage of history.

Their stories of wars, elections, laws and discoveries have taken up most of the room in history books.

But when we look around us, we see that there is a lot more to the past. There is the history of our place of work, the street we walk down, or the friendships we have. All of these things are worth thinking about.

When things are included in history, we assume they are important. Things that are left out of history may not seem important. This is not true. Historians decide what is important to them when they put things in their histories. We can make choices about what to put in and what to leave out, when we do history ourselves. Our idea of what is important is valid too

Doing history means asking questions. First, we need to ask ourselves why some people and events are studied, and others are not. We also need to understand that the way a story is told depends on how the questions are asked, and where we go for the answers. Sometimes historians only find out what they want to find out.

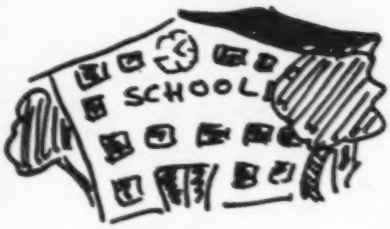
What is History? What is Not?

Everything has a past:

corner stores

families

cities



schools

sports

factories

music

lakes

people getting together to change something they don't like

Their history helps us understand why things are the way they are today.

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2. ORAL HISTORY - AN INTRODUCTION

Ways of Doing History

There are several ways to do history. Many historians work in archives, where old books, reports, letters, laws, newspapers, and diaries are kept. Doing history this way has certain results, because only some things about the past get written down in papers like these.

Some methods are better than others for finding answers to our questions. We have to decide what will help us learn the most about our subject. Now, people are looking at things that weren't part of history before, so some of the old ways of doing history don't work anymore. One new approach is **oral history.**

Oral history uses the spoken word. It is done by finding people who know about a subject, and listening to what they say. This is a powerful way to tell the story of the past.

People as Sources of History

Oral history uses living people as its source. It is done by interviewing people. Their thoughts and memories of the past give us our information. When we do history this way, the people around us become our "living archives". Looking at things that concern us, and talking to the people in our communities, can be called **popular oral history.**

No single written source can tell us everything that happened. For the same reason, oral history is often done by talking to more than one person. Nobody's memory is perfect, and each person has their own ideas about how things were in the past.

Doing Oral History

Many historians do their research by working alone. Oral history is different, because it involves at least two people. First, there is the interviewer, who asks the questions. Then, there is the teller, who has something to share. Sometimes these two people are called the oral historian and the subject or interviewee.

Everyone has stories worth telling. Oral history gives people a chance to talk about their experiences. Their stories are as rich and as varied as any written document could ever be.

Oral history is about dialogue, so there has to be trust and respect between the interviewer and the teller. It is important to make people feel comfortable when they are sharing personal information. At the same time, we need to know how to get answers to the questions we feel are important. We will discuss how to develop these important oral history skills in Sections 4 and 5.

Making History Our Own

Sometimes the people and stories that are part of history don't seem to have much to do with our lives. Oral history gives us a chance for communication in a way that traditional history doesn't. We get to ask the questions, to learn things about issues that affect our lives.

Popular oral history can be done by anyone. You don't have to have written documents or the help of experts. By doing oral history, we take part in deciding what is history. We also get a chance to see how our lives are affected by things we may not have control over.

We don't need years of special training to become popular oral historians. We all have interests and concerns that come from our own experiences. Many of the people in our communities can tell us what we want to know.

The idea behind oral history is to include more perspectives. That means talking to people normally left out of history. It also means choosing history subjects that matter to us.

Point of View

History has a point of view. When two people describe something that happened, their stories can be very different. Just think of the last time you heard two friends describe a movie.

We all have a point of view, or perspective, that affects how we see things. No two people experience what is around them in exactly the same way. Our values, life experiences and purpose in telling a story influence what we say.

Because so much of history has been told from one side, a lot of it doesn't seem to hold true. Different things are meaningful to each of us for different reasons. History is really just a way of pulling together different peoples' perspectives of what happened, to get the bigger picture.

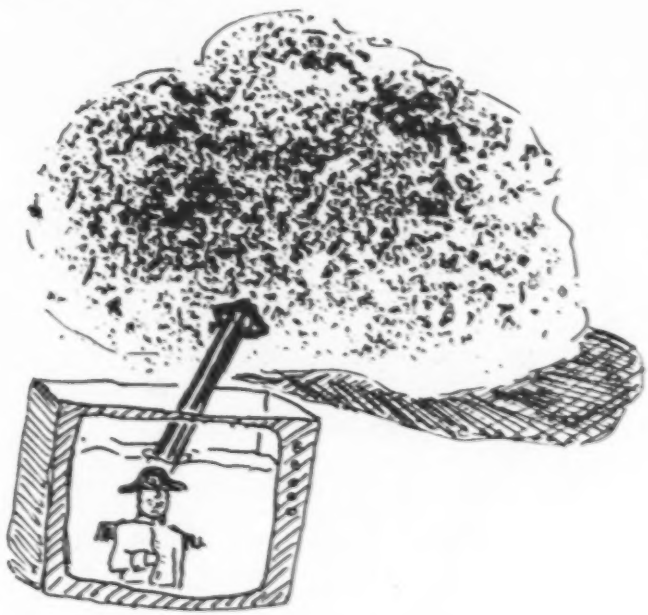
3. POPULAR ORAL HISTORY AND LITERACY

Dialogue

Oral history gives us a chance to build our communication skills. To do interviews, we have to choose our words carefully. We also have to listen well to understand what other people are telling us. This pair of skills is very important in literacy. In Section 8, we will see how writing, reading and other skills fit in too.

Learning by Doing

History can be very useful, but sometimes its meaning is lost. When we are just told facts, it can be hard to see the point.



When we read history, what can't always see what has gone into it. Historians don't usually explain their point of view. We don't know how they put their story together. They want us to believe that their history is the truth.

But we can't know all that there is to know about something in the past if we only hear one side of the story. The perspective of the historian is very important to understand. It explains why history is written or told the way it is.

Popular oral history begins with our own personal experience. From there, we can look at common concerns and experiences. When we share stories, and compare the past and the present, we find out things that can help us make changes in our lives.

4. HOW TO DO A POPULAR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral history projects done by literacy programs should be directed by learners. We don't want to repeat history by telling other people what is important and what isn't!

Curiosity

What are you curious about? That can be your starting point. By the end of the project, you will know more about your subject than you did at the beginning. While you learn, you will have a chance to meet new people and even form friendships.

Choosing a Subject

Popular oral history starts with your experiences. What interests you? Family and community histories can be very interesting. They teach us a lot about ourselves. Choose subjects that people know well and can talk about. You want to hear about things from people who were there!

Finding People

Once you have your subject, you can begin to look for people to talk to. Keep these points in mind:

The person should know something about the subject.
The person should be willing to talk about it.

Contacting People

Have a clear idea of what your project is about before you get in touch with people. Be able to explain it in a few sentences.

Here are two examples of projects, with ideas about who to contact.

Uncle Joe

"My project is about my Uncle Joe. I think his life is interesting and would like to know more about him."

Who would you want to talk to about an oral history about Uncle Joe?

Martha, Joe's sister

Sam, Joe's older brother

Joe

Ethel, Joe's wife

Tom, Joe's oldest friend

The Corner Restaurant

"My project is about an old corner restaurant I go to, that has been in the same place for a long time."

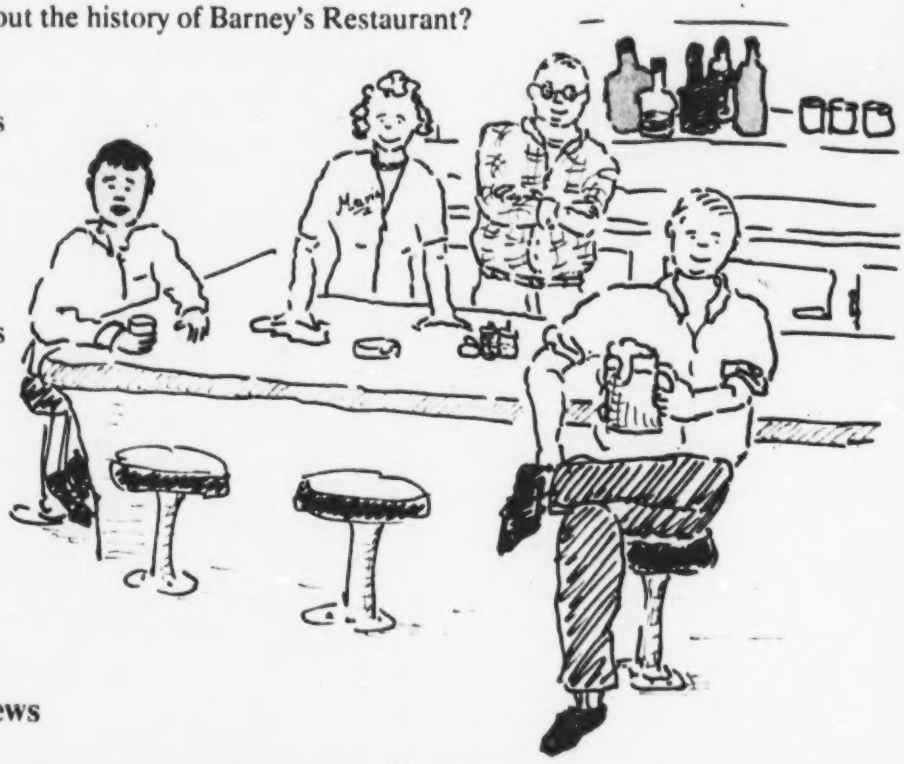
Who could you talk to about the history of Barney's Restaurant?

Barney, the owner of the restaurant for 30 years

Maria, a waitress at the restaurant for 22 years

Harold, the dry cleaner next door who remembers the day Barney opened

Carlos, a customer who has eaten there at least once a week for the past 20 years.



Oral History Interviews

When you do oral history interviews, you will be asking questions. Choose and organize our questions before you go. The interview is like a planned conversation.

Oral history interviews are usually done with a tape recorder. This way, you can listen to people's stories again later. It is much easier than trying to remember everything the person said, or trying to write as fast as someone speaks!

The Teller

In this guide, we call the person answering the questions the teller. You interview them because they have experience or knowledge that is important to your oral history project. Remember that the teller is giving you their time. When you talk to someone about something that has happened to them, they are showing you a part of themselves. Treat the teller with respect and patience.

INTERVIEW TIPS

Asking for Stories

Make a list of the people you wish to interview. Keep in mind why you want to interview them. Phoning works well. Explain who you are and what your oral history project is about. Tell them why you are interested in interviewing them. Explain what the interviews will be used for in the future. It is important to let people know what you are planning to do with their stories and memories. It is often a good idea to visit the person once just to chat, before the interview takes place. That way they know you and will feel more at ease when the time comes to record their stories.

Getting Ready

Once you have a time and place for the interview, you should think of some questions to ask. There should be some general questions to start off, then specific ones to do with the project. Will you want to ask all your tellers the same questions? If each person has different experiences, you should ask questions that will help them tell their own story.

Think about how long you want to the interview to last. It is better to do three hour-long interviews, than one three hour session. Both you and the teller will get tired. Asking and answering questions takes concentration.

Good preparation is one of the keys to successful interviews. Below is a checklist of things to think about before, during and after the interview.

<u>Before the Interview:</u>

Do I have blank tapes?

Do I have the release form?

Is there a plug nearby? If not, are my batteries working?

Do we have a quiet place to do the interview?

Does the teller know why I am interviewing them?

Do I have paper to note things I want to return to?

What I am going to ask?

As you begin the Interview:

Start with a little conversation before you turn the tape recorder on. This will put both of you at ease.

Are you and the teller comfortable? Is there some water handy?

Do a sound check. Is the microphone in a good position for both of you?

During the Interview:

Am I listening to the answers and looking at the person?

How is the teller feeling - tired, nervous?

How much time and tape is left?

After the Interview:

Wind down by chatting with the teller.

Explain the reason for the release form and have the teller sign it.

Thank the teller for sharing their time and experiences.

Label both the cassette and the cardboard in the plastic case.

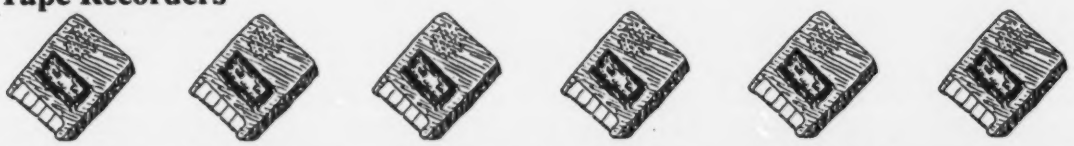
What next? How does this story fit into the bigger project?

5. PRACTICE

1. Equipment

Practising with the equipment is part of learning to be a good interviewer. You need to be used to the equipment, so you can focus on getting stories.

Tape Recorders



The tape recorder is important, but it shouldn't distract you. Asking good questions and being a good listener are easier when a tape recorder is on. It lets you pay attention to the conversation.

By the time you start your oral history project interviews, you should feel confident with the machine.

A tape recorder will record any sound made near it while it is on. You will find out which sounds it picks up as you practice. The best way to get to know the machine is to use it.

You might want to practice in a group or with a partner. Find the spot for the plug. Put in a cassette. Switch on the machine and find out what each button does. Feel free to go over everything until you feel at ease. It is important to know exactly what each of the controls on the machine does.

Microphones

Your tape recorder should have a jack for a plug-in microphone (see Section 6). Set the machine to record. If the microphone has an on/off switch, it has to be on to record. Notice how the sound changes when the microphone is in different places. If the microphone is too far from the person talking, their voice will be faint and hard to hear. If the microphone is too close, their voice will sound strange and will be hard to understand. Try to find the best distance to record at, by moving the microphone around while you record. Background noises on the tape make the voices hard to hear, even if people talk loudly and clearly.

Cassette Tapes

Sound is recorded on cassette tapes. These come in different lengths, from 30 minutes to 120 minutes. Tapes that are 90 minutes long - 45 minutes each side - work best. Longertapes are thin and can sometimes break. If you use shorter tapes, you will have to flip and change them too many times during an interview.

Technical Checklist

Before you start...

* Make sure the tape recorder is plugged in or the batteries are working.
* Check that the cassette is in the machine the right way.
* Make sure the microphone is on a flat surface, at the right distance from the person talking, and pointing the right way.
* Do a sound check with the person's voice before you begin. Have them say a few words, then rewind and listen.

2. Interviews

Good interviews are about good communication. There is nothing mysterious about them. Practising each step will help you feel ready.

Thinking of Questions

As we said in Section 4, it is a good idea to plan your questions. Remember to start with general questions. You can ask things you need to know as background information. You may need to chat for a while to ease the person into a subject that may have happened many years ago.

Interviews can be a little scary at first, for both you and the teller. Be patient. Trying to make them answer questions will only make them uneasy. You are asking another person to share a part of themselves, and need to earn their trust.

The best questions to ask are "open-ended". The opposite of these are "closed" questions. Open-ended questions give the teller lots of ways to answer. Closed questions can only be answered one way. It is your job to ask questions that get people talking.

Here is an example of open-ended and closed questions for a project on "Work we did as children":

"DID YOU WORK ON A FARM WHEN YOU WERE A GIRL?"
"No"
"—?"
"WHERE DID YOU WORK WHEN YOU WERE A GIRL?"
"I WORKED IN MY UNCLES GENERAL STORE ON SATURDAYS UNTIL I WAS ABOUT FOURTEEN."
"I WOULD HELP CUSTOMERS, STOCK SHELVES AND HELP KEEP THE STORE CLEAN. IT WAS VERY BUSY FROM 8 O'CLOCK TILL WE CLOSED AT FIVE. SOMETIMES IF A NEW SHIPMENT WAS COMING IN, I WOULD HELP...

Putting People at Ease

We all follow basic rules when we have conversations. These rules are important when you are doing oral history. For example, you should look at the person you are interviewing. You can help the person relax by being calm and still yourself. You should try not to be distracted by other things in the room or by your equipment. It is also important to speak directly to the teller. Remember to speak clearly and slowly.

It is easy to pay so much attention to your questions that you forget to listen to the answers! Even though the tape recorder is getting everything, you need to pay attention. Think about how you have felt when someone has asked you a question, then not really listened to your answer. If you don't seem to be listening, your teller will think you find their answers boring.

Encouraging Answers

If people see that you are listening, they will want to continue to speak. We let others know we are listening to them in all kinds of ways. These things help make an interview work:

* Look at the person
* Speak clearly
* Listen to the answers
* Give encouragement

Working in Pairs

It is good to practice interviewing by working in pairs. This is how most oral history interviews will be. Here are some exercises that are fun and help you get ready.

Question and Answer Exercise:

Ask your partner three questions. Try to make up open-ended questions. A good practice topic might be "Where I was born". After you have asked your questions, switch. The questions don't have to be the same each time.

In the same pairs, talk about how the questions worked. Keep in mind that you are practising how to think of good questions and how to ask them well. You might want to think about these points:

1. Were the questions easy to understand? Did any of them make the person uneasy?

2. What did the interviewer do while the question was being answered?

3. Did the person answering feel that the answer was important to the person who asked the question?

This exercise can be done several times, with different partners and any topics that come to mind. By asking many different people questions, we get a good idea of what an oral history project is like.

Recording Exercises:

Most of us have seen microphones on television, on stage or at public events. In public, microphones make voices louder than normal. On television, they are held by reporters and experts who explain events for us. Microphones seem to mean authority. When a person is holding one, they are usually in control of something, or speaking to large numbers of people. We can explore this idea, by role-playing with microphones.

Talk Show

One person might act as a talk show host. They can go through the "audience" with a microphone and ask people questions about themselves. Playback the tape for all to enjoy.

The News

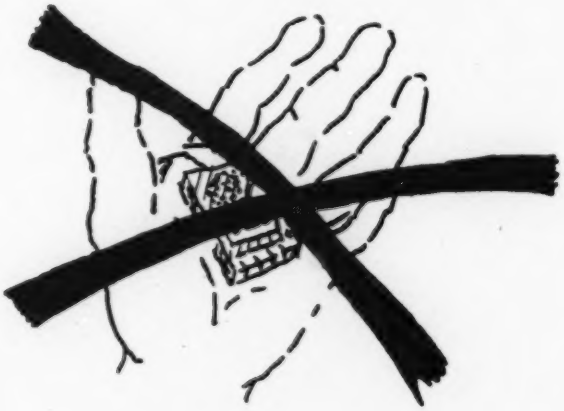
Another powerful image of microphones can be seen on the TV news. You can role-play being reporters. Two people can do this exercise. One of you can be the reporter. You can ask questions about things that have happened in the other person's family or community over the past week. You can then gather all these interviews and listen to them as a group. This exercise shows that people's own experiences are news. They are part of history.

6. CHOOSING EQUIPMENT

The tape recorder and other equipment we use in oral history work are our tools. They are not the focus. We should learn how to use them simply to make our work easier.

Choosing Tape Recorders

There are many tape recorders on the market today. Some cost thousands of dollars, others are quite inexpensive. The more expensive machines have features you don't need for an oral history project.



Machines come in different sizes. As a general rule, the smaller the machine, the more expensive it will be. The smallest machines are also hard to use. The buttons are tricky. They use more expensive miniature tapes. They are not really meant for interviewing.

Buying a small stereo with a built-in microphone is not a good idea either. These are awkward and heavy to carry around. They are meant to play music, not record interviews. Built-in microphones are not usually good enough for interviews.

The kind of tape recorder that you need is not expensive. Less than $100.00 (1991 prices) will usually do. The tape recorder you buy should have these features:

* A jack for a plug-in microphone. You can really improve the recording quality by using a good microphone with your tape recorder.

* It should work on batteries or by plugging it into an outlet. You never know where you will need to record.

* An external speaker so you don't need headphones to listen to tapes, and so that more than one person can listen at once.

* A tape counter. This is important for transcribing or noting the parts of an interview you want to return to.

* A pause button. Sometimes interviews are interrupted. It is better not to have to reset the recording buttons.

The old fashioned looking machines work best for our purposes. They are sturdy. They often have small handles for carrying. You be the judge. You want a tape recorder that won't scare people. Before you buy one, ask about the warranty. Some manufacturers give better warranties than others. If something goes wrong with the tape recorder and it isn't under warranty, it can cost a lot to fix. Keep in mind that the machine may be used by several people and get a lot of wear.

Choosing Microphones

The microphone is very important. You should spend as much, if not a bit more, on the microphone as on the tape recorder. There are many types of microphones for different kinds of recording.

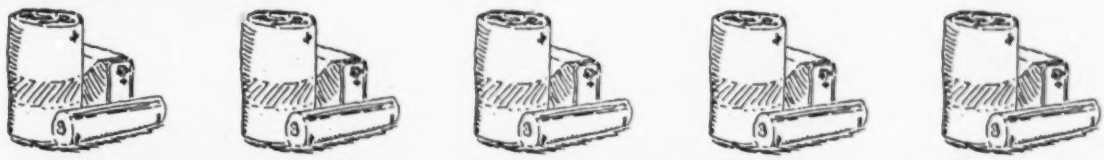
The human voice needs a special kind of microphone. Explain to the salesperson that you want it for interviews. It is best to get a "unidirectional" microphone. This means it records sound from only one direction, instead of getting all the background noise that is going on during an interview.

Choosing Cassette Tapes

There is a price range for cassettes, too. Ninety minute tapes work best. You can get the best price for tapes at audio or discount electronics stores. You can save money by buying tapes in boxes of ten, if you think you will need that many.

"Normal bias" tapes, not "high bias", are fine for an oral history project. More expensive tapes are for recording music. You can expect to pay between $1 and $2 (1991 prices) per tape.

Choosing Batteries



If you are going to use batteries to run your tape recorder, you need to get good quality ones. The cheapest brands usually don't last very long. If you are planning to run the tape recorder with batteries a lot, you may want to get rechargeable batteries. They cost a little more, but you can get hundreds of interviews out of them, so they end up being cheaper. If you use rechargeable batteries, you will need a recharger. This is a small unit you put your used batteries in and plug into the wall. You can usually buy it where you buy your batteries.

Don't leave batteries in the machine for very long if you aren't using it. They can leak and damage your tape recorder.

Caring for the Equipment

Like all electronics equipment, tape recorders need care. Don't let them get wet or dirty. Too much dust over a long period will make them break down. When you aren't using the tape recorder, keep it in a plastic bag or a box. Put it where it won't be banged or jostled.

Treat your microphone just as carefully. Store the plug, microphone and tape recorder together so everything will be ready for the next interview.

7. RELEASE FORMS AND DOCUMENTATION

You still have to think of the teller after the interview. As soon as you have someone's story on tape, you must fill out a release form. This makes it clear how the tapes can and cannot be used. There is also some basic record keeping to do.

Whose Stories Are They?

A taped interview is an oral document. That means is that it is a record of history. The stories you have heard in the interviews really belong to the people who told them. You must ask the teller to let you use their stories in your project. The release form should clearly explain what will happen to the tapes. This form isn't just a formality. It must be kept as part of the tape collection. Without it, you cannot share the recordings with other people.

On the next page, there is an example of the kind of release form you need if you want to deposit your tapes in an archives.

If you do not intend to deposit your tapes in an archive, you can take out the part about public use.

Release Form

Name of Interviewee (Teller) _____

Date of Interview _____

Place of Interview _____

This recorded interview may be used by the public, according to guidelines established by the Archives of Ontario.

Subject to Canadian copyright law, it may become the property of (literacy program, community group, Archives) _____.

This recording has no restrictions _____

This recording cannot be used for (lifetime, or specific time period) _____ During this period, it may be used with my written permission only.

This recording may be used only for the following purpose (s)

_____

Understood, agreed and signed:

Interviewee (Teller) _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Interviewer _____

Date _____

Labelling Tapes

A music cassette has the names of the singer or band printed on it. Interview tapes should tell you who was interviewed, who did the interviewing and the date and place. Put this information on a label stuck right on the cassette. There is usually a piece of cardboard to write this on inside the cassette case as well. Both should have this information, because cassettes and their cases often get mixed up.

Identifying the tapes is very important if you want to use them later. A year after the interview, you might not recognize the voice of the teller. It is also important to credit the tellers for their stories. If you have a really interesting story, others may want to use it, and will need to know where to look.

Using Tapes

Be thoughtful about using people's stories, and make sure the release form says the right thing. A teller may decide their story can only be used for learning and should not be published anywhere. If the teller wants to be told before the story is used, you must remember to do this. People may be glad to share their stories with certain restrictions. For example, some people will agree to have tapes made public after their death, or will allow some parts of their story to be told.

Storing Tapes in an Archives

You may wonder what to do with the tapes after your project is over. You could put them in an archives. Everyone who is part of the project should make this decision. The people you interview should be told that this is what will happen to the tapes. Again, all of this should be on the release forms. Finally, you should get in touch with the archives you want to deposit the tapes in. Not all archives accept oral history tapes.

Some tapes are useful to an archives collection, where other people can use them for research. In archives, historical documents are stored carefully. Archives do not lend materials like libraries. They must be used there. Many archives collect cassette tapes because they recognize their value to history. Archives are also safe places to store valuable tapes.

Storing Tapes Yourself

If you decide an archives is not a good place for your oral history tapes, you will need to store them properly, in case anyone wants to listen to them again.

Cassette tapes will last longer if they are kept away from bright light and heat. They should not be in direct sun. Dark, cool, but not damp places like closets and filing cabinets are good.

Dust also harms tapes. The tape should always be kept in its plastic case. Special filing or storage boxes are best. If your tapes are in a box, remember to label it too.

Follow-Up

Even if all the tellers have signed a release form, it is a good idea to share your plans with them. They have a right to see how their words and memories will be used. Sometimes they will have good ideas about how to use their stories.

A follow-up phone call may be enough, or you could invite the tellers to a meeting. If the project involves visual art or theatre, it would be fun to invite them to see what was created from their stories.

It is important to get people's comments. This helps keep their trust. Oral history would be hard to do, if people worried about how their stories were going to be used once they were recorded. If you involve the tellers, you will continue to build an interest in oral history in the community. Doing a thoughtful oral history project can give you a chance to raise awareness about literacy as well.

By including your tellers, you are saying that history is a group process. It is not about controlling information. It is important to keep these things in mind during all the phases of an oral history project.

8. USING STORIES FOR LEARNING

How can taped stories be shared? Steps for turning your oral material into print are explained in this section. You may choose other media as well, or instead.

Doing Tape Summaries

There are many ways to do summaries. Some include information about every question and answer in the interview, but you probably don't need this much detail. A few sentences that explain who is being interviewed and what is covered are fine. It is useful to note the most important or interesting parts of the interview.

Tape summaries quickly tell you what is on a cassette, so you don't need to listen to it to get an idea of what it is about. It shouldn't be long. You don't need to explain why the information is important in a summary.

Summaries also help others who want to use the tapes. Historians, researchers or other people doing history projects will look at a tape summary to find out if they should listen to the tape itself.

Here is an example of a summary of an interview with a political refugee about his decision to come to Canada:

Tape Summary - Cesar Sanchez Interview

This is an interview with Cesar Sanchez, an El Salvadoran union activist, by David Bowman. He explains what made him decide to move to Canada in 1986. Sanchez was threatened at his workplace after many months of strikes and problems with secret police. He also talks about being accepted as a refugee in Canada, and his first 6 months in Toronto, Ontario.

Transcribing

When you make a tape summary, you are using your own words to say what is on the tape. Transcribing means writing the words that are actually said in the interview. It makes the oral history interview into a written document. The written version of the interview is called a transcript. Sometimes people will transcribe a whole interview. You can also choose short sections to transcribe.

As we said in the equipment section, your tape recorder should have a tape counter and a pause button. The pause button will allow you to stop the tape easily after every few words, so you can copy them down.

Tape counters are useful for transcribing, because the numbers tell you where you are in the tape. For example, you might jot down during the interview that the part from number 178 to 215 is very interesting. Then, when you are doing the transcript, you don't have to search the whole tape to find it. You return to those numbers on the counter. Make sure the counter is at zero at the beginning of the recording. Beware that tape counters on different machines don't count at the same rate. Try to use the same kind of tape recorder for transcribing that you interviewed with.

The best way to do a transcript is to listen to the part of the interview you want to transcribe at least once through. Start with a short section and see how it goes. Be sure to put down the name of the person whose words you are writing.

Doing a transcript is a good way to review the interview. It can help you understand the information better. The meaning of the words can become clearer. An exact transcript has **every word** that was spoken by both the interviewer and the teller. It should also note long pauses, laughing or other ways of communicating. Here is an sample portion of an interview transcript, from stories collected by literacy programs during International Literacy Year.

> **There used to be a witch now they don't believe such a thing happened but there was aahhh witch my mother told me about that. When my father went to hunt we would all get into bed with my mother, and there was three of us Katie and Jenny and I. And she tell us the stories .... And this witch witched my mother because she married my father and this woman wanted to marry him. And she was mad at my mother so she got her witched. This witch came from Combermere somewhere in the bush she lived there somewhere in a log cabin. Anyway my mother got sick shortly after they were married... she got real sick, she couldn't get out of bed she could eat she brought up everything she ate. And they used to see a fox a fox coming down the lake shore there where we lived down by the dam. This fox would walk down shore all on fire...it was all on fire.**

Notice how short pauses are marked with "..." Longer pauses can be noted as (long pause). If someone laughs, it can be shown as (laughs). These are in a transcript because they are meaningful and are part of the story. The pauses in this example show that the person was remembering a vivid, tense time. A transcript should include these details.

People repeat words or use sounds like ummm, or ahhh when they talk. A proper transcript will include everything. You can decide how far you want to go with this. You should think about who will be reading the transcripts, and why.

Editing

Once you have a transcript, you may decide to edit it. This makes the story easier to read. Editing doesn't mean changing people's words. In oral history, we want to stay true to the spoken stories. Editing means you can leave out some of the repetition and the pauses. Sometimes you can change the order of sentences or paragraphs if this helps tell the story. If you leave things out or change the order, you must show three dots "..." in place of the original words. Here is an example of editing from the transcript above:

"There used to be a witch. Now they don't believe such a thing happened, but there was a witch, my mother told me about that. When my father went to hunt we would all get into bed with my mother; all three of us, Katie and Jenny and I, and my mother would tell us stories.

This witch witched my mother because she married my father when this other woman wanted to marry him. So this other woman was mad at my mother so she got her witched. This witch came from Combermere somewhere in the bush. She lived there somewhere in a log cabin.

Anyway, my mother got sick shortly after they were married. She got real sick; she couldn't get out of bed, she couldn't eat, she brought up everything she ate. And they used to see a fox, a fox coming down the shore all on fire. It was all on fire."

Quoting

The edited story above has quotation marks (" "). You don't need these in a transcript, because we know that everything in it was said by someone. When you edit, though, you have a voice in what you are writing. Quotation marks show which words are someone else's, not yours.
Here is an example:

Leaving El Salvador

We spoke to Cesar Sanchez in his home in Toronto about leaving his country. He told us the story of his decision to leave.

"It was a very painful day. I was working in the factory. Maybe a week earlier there had been a strike. The leader of our organization had been beaten at night."

As Cesar was working he was startled.

"Four men came to where I was working. They surprised me, I was at a noisy machine. One of them tapped me on the shoulder and whispered in my ear that they were the four men who had beaten my friend earlier."

The story is told by showing the exact words of the story teller in quotations. The story begins with a short introduction by the interviewer/editor. Stories can be very interesting to read when they are written this way.

Quotations, or quotes, are used in many kinds of writing besides oral history. Newspaper reporters use tape recorders so they can quote people in the stories they write afterwards. You are doing the same thing. The transcript allows you to quote correctly, without having to listen to the tape again. The reader knows that the words in quotation marks are exactly what the person said.

Pulling it Together

Listening to interviews with others is a good way to find out which parts of the story will interest people. Sometimes you find something in your interviews that you hadn't expected, and will want to ask other people in your group about it. You can learn about each other by sharing the information you have gathered. It is part of the learning process to figure out what the stories mean.

Other Ways of Story Telling

Using written words is just one way to tell a story. We can use them with other methods to create interesting oral history.

Photographs often work well along with written words to tell a story. For example, a photo of the person who told the story helps us picture what they said. If that person is from another country, a map or picture from there would help bring the story to life.

In the story of Cesar Sanchez, a map showing El Salvador might be of interest. A photograph or picture of where Cesar worked would also add to the story.

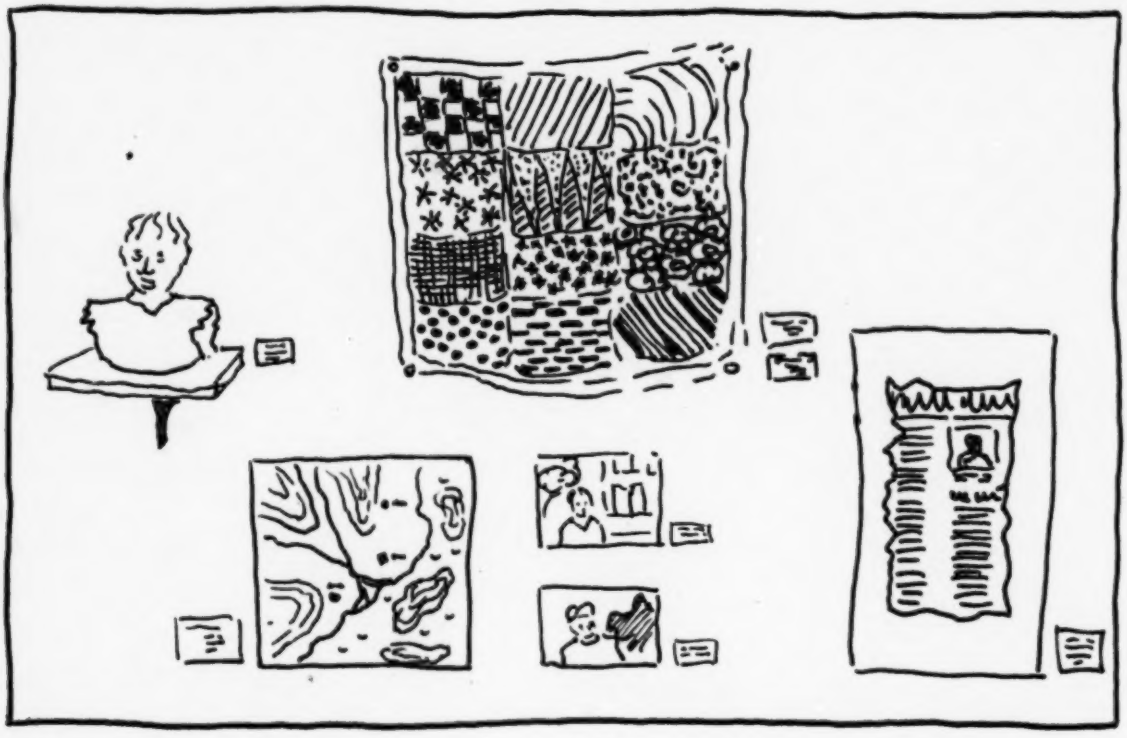
You may want to talk to others who know about oral history or your subject. Libraries can have all kinds of supporting materials. Other sources of information to look for might be:

photographs	**music**
illustrations	**written material**
maps	**films**

On the next two pages are examples of interesting support material from a book of interviews called Beyond the Barricades, 1969-1970 A Forum on the Legacies of Campus Activism, published by Experimental College, Tufts University.

It can be fun to see things from the past. These extra pieces of information can help you understand the stories you have gathered. They put your interview in the bigger historical picture.

It is not necessary to stick to words and pictures on a page. You can experiment with drama, visual art, music, or anything that inspires you!



Tufts: neutral or engaged?

Senior Vote Rejects Traditional Graduation

Tufts University, 1969

X-Col to request foundation money for black, earth, and media studies

David Dellinger Brings Chicago to Tufts

Earth Day at Tufts

.6 Arrested for Drugs;
cludes 12 from Tufts

onstruction Controversy Continues

West Hall gutted by fire

Afros Stage Dorm Work Stoppage;
Administration Obtains Restraining Order

TOP 40 HITS
1969

PK DATE	PK POS	PK WKS	RANK	TITLE	ARTIST
4/12	1	6	1.	Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In	The 5th Dimension
7/12	1	6	2.	In The Year 2525	Zager & Evans
5/24	1	5	3.	Get Back	The Beatles
9/20	1	4	4.	Sugar, Sugar	The Archies
8/23	1	4	5.	Honky Tonk Women	The Rolling Stones
2/15	1	4	6.	Everyday People	Sly & The Family Stone
3/15	1	4	7.	Dizzy	Tommy Roe
11/08	1	3	8.	Wedding Bell Blues	The 5th Dimension
10/18	1	2	9.	I Can't Get Next To You	The Temptations*
2/01	1	2	10.	Crimson And Clover	Tommy James & The Shondells
12/06	1	2	11.	Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye	Steam
6/28	1	2	12.	Love Theme From Romeo & Juliet	Henry Mancini
12/20	1	1	13.	Leaving On A Jet Plane	Peter, Paul & Mary
11/29	1	1	14.	Come Together	The Beatles
12/27	1	1	15.	Someday We'll Be Together	Diana Ross & The Supremes
11/01	1	1	16.	Suspicious Minds	Elvis Presley
7/26	2	3	17.	Crystal Blue Persuasion	Tommy James & The Shondells
3/08	2	3	18.	Proud Mary	Creedence Clearwater Revival
7/05	2	3	19.	Spinning Wheel	Blood, Sweat & Tears
8/23	2	3	20.	A Boy Named Sue	Johnny Cash
4/12	2	3	21.	You've Made Me So Very Happy	Blood, Sweat & Tears
5/10	2	2	22.	Hair	The Cowsills
1/11	2	2	23.	I'm Gonna Make You Love Me	The Supremes & The Temptations
10/18	2	2	24.	Hot Fun In The Summertime	Sly & The Family Stone
10/04	2	2	25.	Jean	Oliver
5/31	2	2	26.	Love (Can Make You Happy)	Mercy
9/27	2	1	27.	Green River	Creedence Clearwater Revival
11/22	2	1	28.	Take A Letter Maria	R.B. Greaves
5/03	2	1	29.	It's Your Thing	The Isley Brothers
11/29	2	1	30.	And When I Die	Blood, Sweat & Tears
6/28	2	1	31.	Bad Moon Rising	Creedence Clearwater Revival
3/29	2	1	32.	Traces	Classics IV/Dennis Yost
2/22	3	3	33.	Build Me Up Buttercup	The Foundations
11/15	3	2	34.	Something	The Beatles
10/04	3	2	35.	Little Woman	Bobby Sherman
2/01	3	2	36.	Worst That Could Happen	Brooklyn Bridge
3/29	3	2	37.	Time Of The Season	The Zombies
7/12	3	2	38.	Good Morning Starshine	Oliver
1/11	3	1	39.	Wichita Lineman	Glen Campbell
12/20	3	1	40.	Down On The Corner	Creedence Clearwater Revival

TOP-RATED PRIME-TIME TELEVISION PROGRAMS

October 1969-April 1970

	Program	Network	Rating
1.	Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In	NBC	26.3
2.	Gunsmoke	CBS	25.9
3.	Bonanza	NBC	24.8
4.	Mayberry R.F.D.	CBS	24.4
5.	Family Affair	CBS	24.2
6.	Here's Lucy	CBS	23.9
7.	The Red Skelton Hour	CBS	23.8
8.	Marcus Welby, M.D.	ABC	23.7
9.	Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color	NBC	23.6
10.	The Doris Day Show	CBS	22.8
11.	The Bill Cosby Show	NBC	22.7
12.	The Jim Nabors Hour	CBS	22.4
13.	The Carol Burnett Show	CBS	22.1
14.	The Dean Martin Show	NBC	21.9
15.	My Three Sons	CBS	21.8
	Ironside	NBC	21.8
	The Johnny Cash Show	ABC	21.8
18.	The Beverly Hillbillies	CBS	21.7
19.	Hawaii Five-O	CBS	21.1
20.	The Glen Campbell Goodtime Hour	CBS	21.0
	Hee Haw	CBS	21.0
22.	Movie of the Week	ABC	20.9
23.	Mod Squad	ABC	20.8
24.	Saturday Night Movie	NBC	20.8
	Bewitched	ABC	20.8
	The F.B.I.	ABC	20.8

Making Links to History

Every oral history interview is linked to broader questions in history. Once you have done some interviews on one theme, you might want to map out where these stories are in history. To do this, you might ask these questions:

How do the interviews on different themes go together?

How are they different?

How are they the same?

What is the order of these stories in time?

How does our subject link to subjects that others have done?

These relationships are what historians try to discover. If we understand patterns of events and how things connect, we can begin to understand why things happen the way they do.

Even a small part of an interview can be linked to other themes and questions. Take the example of Cesar Sanchez. His is the story of one refugee - what are the stories of other refugees? Do other refugees have the same experiences and reasons for leaving their countries?

Cesar's own story about El Salvador raises other questions. Who were the four men who threatened Cesar? Why did his union activities cause these men to do that? These questions lead to other questions about the history of El Salvador and about the role of unions. Like all things in history, Cesar's experiences had to do with other stories of the past.

Doing oral history helps us see how people's stories are an important part of our learning. The more questions we ask, and the more we find out, the more we discover there is to learn!

9. FURTHER READING

Oral History

Approaching Ontario's Past: Conducting an Oral History Interview, by Celia Hitch and Jay Norris, Ontario Historical Society, Booklet No. 7, 1988.

This is a short guide on how to do interviews and can be ordered from the Ontario Historical Society if you can't find it at the library. It takes a more formal approach than this guide. For example, it suggests that letters be sent to people you wish to interview, and gives samples of them.

Designing an Oral History Project, unpublished booklet from the Oral History Center, 186 1/2 Hampshire St., Cambridge, Mass., 02139.

This booklet is based on several years of useful experience doing community-based oral history in the Boston area.

Handbook of Oral History, Recording Life Stories, by Stephen Humphries, Inter-Action Imprint Creative Community Projects Series, 1984.

This is a book from Britain that takes a project approach to oral history. It has useful information on finding people to interview and ideas about presenting the interviews when they are done. It takes a popular education view.

Voices: A Guide to Oral History, edited by Derek Reimer, Sound and Moving Images Division, Provincial Archives on British Columbia, 1984.

This is a detailed guide to conducting and transcribing interviews. It assumes that tapes will be deposited in an archives. It also talks about how interviews fit into other kinds of history research. It is available in many public libraries or can be ordered from the Archives of British Columbia.

Popular Education

A Popular Education Handbook, by Rick Arnold and Bev Burke, CUSO, 1983. Available from CUSO or DEC Books, Toronto.

This is a very useful why-to and how-to book on popular education, based on the Central American experience.

A New Weave, Popular Education in Canada and Central America, by Rick Arnold, Deborah Barndt and Bev Burke, CUSO/OISE. Also available from DEC.

This booklet offers a good explanation of popular education theory, and presents a participatory training model.

Educating for a Change : A Handbook for Community Educators, by Rick Arnold, et al, Between the Lines Press, Toronto, 1991.

This is a very thorough book about applying the principles of democracy to community-based education. It is particularly helpful for facilitators.

Training for Empowerment, by Judith Marshall, Doris Marshall Institute, Toronto, 1990.

This kit contains interesting exercises from Mozambique, Nicaragua and Brazil, and discusses issues concerning education for social change.